

April 27, 2006 - FULL RETREAT: GOP Pulls Lobby "Reform" Bill in Face of Democratic Pressure

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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GOP Pulls Lobby "Reform" Bill in Face of Democratic Pressure

Washington, DC - Rep. David Dreier (R-CA-26) today withdrew the Lobbying Accountability and Transparency Act of 2006 (H.R. 4975) from consideration by the House immediately following critical statements made on the floor by Rep. Louise M. Slaughter (D-NY-28) and Rep. Jim McGovern (D-MA-3).

It is widely believed the rule and underlying bill were pulled because the Republican leadership has lost the support of their own conference members in the face of sustained, mounting pressure from Democrats.

"The corruption of this Republican-led Congress is beyond debate" Rep. Slaughter said on the floor of the House today. "The American people don't trust it any more. Fewer than 30 percent approve of the job it is doing."

"This rule and this bill give us the all too predictable answer to this burning question: This Leadership doesn't want reform, and they just aren't going to allow it," Rep. Slaughter said.

"The Republican Leadership's so-called 'reform' bill deserves to collapse under the weight of its own hypocrisy," Rep. McGovern said shortly afterward. "What everyone knows, but what the Republicans refuse to acknowledge, is that there is a direct connection between the corruption that has become so commonplace in the House and the breakdown of the deliberative process."

BACKGROUND

For months, Democrats have been putting mounting pressure on the GOP to strengthen any ethics reform bill it planned to bring to the floor.

Democrats have consistently argued that Republicans have incorrectly sought to shift blame for the corruption plaguing Congress from Members to Lobbyists. As Rep. Slaughter has said, "Lobbyists can only knock on the door. Members are the ones who have to open it."

Democrats have called not for "lobby reform," as Republicans have, but for comprehensive "ethics reform." Such a plan would not just eliminate corrupt lobbying practices, but would also reform the broken political process of the House so that corruption would be eliminated at its source. As early as January, Democrats unveiled the Honest Leadership and Open Government Act (H.R. 4682) which was designed to achieve these goals.

In addition to pressure from Democrats, criticism of Republican lobby "reform" efforts have been relentless, culminating recently in blunt denunciations of H.R. 4975 in major newspapers, including the Washington Post ([click here](#)), Roll Call ([click here](#)), and the New York Times ([click here](#)).

The complete text of Rep. Slaughter's remarks, as prepared, can be found below:

Mr. Speaker,

After a seemingly interminable era of scandal, this Congress was given the greatest opportunity in a generation to change the way business is done in Washington. We were given the chance to truly make a difference, to do something lasting.

We were given the chance to help the citizens of this nation believe in their government again. That chance has been squandered. This congress has failed. And in so doing, the hypocrisy and cynicism displayed today by the Majority of this House, will be neither missed, nor forgotten by the American people. We have before us the Lobbying Accountability and Transparency Act of 2006. It is supposed to be a reform bill.

But you can't be bold enough to reform if you don't muster the courage to address the problems. The corruption of this

Republican-led Congress is beyond debate. The American people don't trust it any more - fewer than 30 percent approve of the job it is doing. The only remaining question was how the Members of this Leadership were going to respond. How committed were they going to be to reforming their bankrupt philosophy of government?

This rule and this bill give us the all too predictable answer to this burning question: This Leadership doesn't want reform, and they just aren't going to allow it. As virtually every outside observer has noted in recent days, this legislation is a sham. It won't do anything to reduce influence peddling in Washington, or to purge this body of the corruption that has infected it so deeply.

I know we're going to hear much more on this later. But what I really want my fellow Americans to focus on right now is something just as telling as the contents of this bill... that is the process by which it was created. As I and my Democratic colleagues have said again and again throughout this entire Congress, a corrupt legislative process produces corrupt legislation.

If bills are written and changed behind closed doors, then there will be no way to know what is hidden in them. If amendments to bills are rejected, not because of their contents, but because of the party they come from, then democracy will have been denied.

If the Members of this body are committed to undermining the two-centuries old rules of this House, then they are also intent on undermining the will and needs of the citizens of this country. And so it has been with this rule, and with this bill.

When this bill faced an original jurisdiction mark-up on April 5th, Democrats presented numerous amendments to it in an attempt to actually give it some substance.

All of these amendments were defeated on a straight party-line vote. During its mark-up, the Judiciary Committee was the only body that adopted any bipartisan amendments to this legislation. Democrats successfully introduced amendments requiring lobbyists to disclose more of their activities, such fundraisers for candidates and parties they fund honoring Members of Congress. But the bill we thought we had when we left for recess two weeks ago isn't the one before us today.

Most of the amendments accepted by the Judiciary Committee mysteriously disappeared while we were away. The Majority decided to do this on its own, without telling anyone, and while nobody was looking. It was an indefensible abuse of power.

My Democratic colleagues and I also offered a substitute to this bill that addressed the many areas it is silent on. Among its many components, our legislation would have established a new Office of Public Integrity to audit and investigate compliance with lobbying disclosure rules. And it would have prevented special interest provisions from being added into bills in the dead of night by requiring all legislation to be made public 24 hours before it is voted on.

Last night in the Rules Committee, my Republican friends had one last chance to open the process up and allow real debate on this bill. But in typical fashion, they blocked a host of significant amendments, including 20 of the 21 amendments submitted by Democrats. And they wouldn't allow our tougher substitute to even be considered on the floor today.

I ask my friends on the Majority: what kind of reform is that? What conclusion are you asking the American people to draw from this kind of behavior? When you won't even allow this body to consider and debate alternative approaches to reforming this Congress, what are you hiding from? And when you subvert our democratic process and the same time you are pretending to be the part of reform, how can you possibly expect us to trust you any longer?

When your leadership doesn't even have faith in our legislative process, how can the American people have faith in you to lead?

Lobbyists aren't the reason our Congress no longer works for working Americans. Congress is the problem. We heard so much in January from Republicans about reform. But here they are, four months later, doing exactly the same thing, and producing exactly the same result: Bad bills jammed through a broken House. Bills just like this one, that have a catchy name, but don't deliver what they promise. Bills that aren't written for the people of this nation- but rather for the special interests.

No wonder the American people are so angry. Their congressional leadership is so clearly out of touch. Every member of the majority should be ashamed of this bill today. Ashamed. At least then, you will have something in common with the American people you profess to serve.

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